Earlier this week, Madam President, several of our

Republican colleagues came to the Senate and attempted to blame

individual Democratic Senators for their errors in judgment about the

war in Iraq. It was little more than a devious attempt to obscure the

facts and take the focus off the real reason we went to war in Iraq.

Madam President, 150,000 American troops are bogged down in a quagmire

in Iraq because the Bush administration misrepresented and distorted

the intelligence to justify a war that America never should have

fought. The President wrongly and repeatedly insisted that it was too

dangerous to ignore the weapons of mass destruction in the hands of

Saddam Hussein and his ties to al-Qaida.

If his march to war, President Bush exaggerated the threat to the

American people. It was not subtle. It was not nuanced. It was pure,

unadulterated fear mongering based on a devious strategy to convince

the American people that Saddam's ability to provide nuclear weapons to

al-Qaida justified immediate war.

The administration officials suggested the threat from Iraq was

imminent and went to great lengths to convince the American people that

it was. At a roundtable discussion with European journalists last

month, Secretary Rumsfeld deviously insisted:

In fact, Secretary Rumsfeld told the House Committee on Armed

Services on September 18, 2002:

In May of 2003, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer was asked whether

we went to war because we said WMD were a direct and imminent threat to

the United States. And Fleischer responded, ``Absolutely.''

What else could National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice have been

suggesting other than an imminent threat, extremely imminent threat

when she said on September 2, 2002:

President Bush himself may not have used the word ``imminent,'' but

he carefully chose strong and loaded words about the nature of the

threat, words that the intelligence community never used to persuade

and prepare the Nation to go to war against Iraq.

In the Rose Garden on October 2, 2002, as Congress was preparing to

vote on authorizing the war, the President said the Iraqi regime ``is a

threat of unique urgency.''

In a speech in Cincinnati on October 7, President Bush specifically

invoked the dangers of nuclear devastation:

At an appearance in New Mexico on October 28, 2002, after Congress

had voted to authorize war and a week before the election, President

Bush said Iraq is a ``real and dangerous threat.''

At a NATO summit on November 20, 2002, President Bush said Iraq posed

a ``unique and urgent threat.''

In Ft. Hood, TX, on January 3, 2003, President Bush called the Iraqi

regime ``a grave threat.''

Nuclear weapons. Mushroom cloud. Unique and urgent threat. Real and

dangerous threat. Grave threat. These words were the administration's

rallying cry to war. But they were not the words of the intelligence

community, which never suggested the threat from Saddam was imminent or

immediate or urgent.

It was Vice President Cheney who first laid out the trumped-up

argument for war with Iraq to an unsuspecting public. In a speech on

August 26, 2002, to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, he asserted:

As we now know, the intelligence community was far from certain. Yet

the Vice President had been convinced.

On September 8, 2002, he was even more emphatic about Saddam. He

said:

The intelligence community was deeply divided about the aluminum

tubes, but Vice President Cheney was absolutely certain.

One month later, on the eve of the watershed vote by Congress to

authorize the war, President Bush said it even more vividly. He said:

In fact, as we now know, the intelligence community was far from

convinced of any such threat. The administration attempted to conceal

that fact by classifying the information and the dissents within the

intelligence community until after the war, even while making dramatic

and excessive public statements about the immediacy of the danger.

In October of 2002, the intelligence agencies jointly issued a

national intelligence estimate stating that ``most agencies'' believe

that Iraq had restarted its nuclear program after inspectors left in

1998 and that if left unchecked, Iraq ``probably will have a nuclear

weapon during this decade.''

The State Department's intelligence bureau, however, said the

``available evidence'' was inadequate to support that judgment. It

refused to predict when ``Iraq could acquire a nuclear device or

weapon.''

About the claims of purchases of nuclear material from Africa, the

State Department's intelligence bureau said that claims of Iraq seeking

to purchase nuclear material from Africa were ``highly dubious.'' The

CIA sent two memoranda to the White House stressing strong doubts about

those claims. But the following January 2003, the President included

the claims about Africa in his State of the Union Address and

conspicuously cited the British Government as the source of that

intelligence.

Information about nuclear weapons was not the only intelligence

distorted by the administration. On the question of whether Iraq was

pursuing a chemical weapons program, the Defense Intelligence Agency

concluded in September 2002 that:

That same month, however, Secretary Rumsfeld told the Committee on

Armed Services that Saddam has chemical weapons stockpiles.

He said, ``We do know that the Iraqi regime has chemical and

biological weapons of mass destruction,'' that Saddam ``has amassed

large clandestine stocks of chemical weapons.'' He said that ``he has

stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons'' and that Iraq has

``active chemical, biological and nuclear programs.'' He was wrong on

all counts.

Yet the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate actually

quantified the size of the stockpiles, stating that ``although we have

little specific information on Iraq's CW stockpile, Saddam probably has

stocked at least 100 metric tons and possibly as much as 500 metric

tons of CW agents--much of it added in the last year.'' In his address

to the United Nations on February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin

Powell went further, calling the 100 to 500 metric ton stockpile a

``conservative estimate.''

Secretary Rumsfeld made an even more explicit assertion in his

interview on ``This Week with George Stephanopoulos'' on March 30,

2003. When asked about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, he said:

The administration's case for war based on the linkage between Saddam

Hussein and al-Qaida was just as misguided.

Significantly, here as well, the Intelligence Estimate did not find a

cooperative relationship between Saddam and al-Qaida. On the contrary,

it stated only that such a relationship might develop in the future if

Saddam was ``sufficiently desperate''--in other words, if America went

to war. But the estimate placed ``low confidence'' that, even in

desperation, Saddam would give weapons of mass destruction to al-Qaida.

But President Bush was not deterred. He was relentless in playing to

America's fears after the devastating tragedy of 9/11. He drew a clear

link--and drew it repeatedly--between al-Qaida and Saddam.

On September 25, 2002, at the White House, President Bush flatly

declared:

In his State of the Union Address in January 2003, President Bush

said, ``Evidence from intelligence sources, secret communications, and

statements by people now in custody reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and

protects terrorists, including members of Al Qaeda,'' and that he could

provide ``lethal viruses'' to a ``shadowy terrorist network.''

Two weeks later, in his Saturday radio address to the Nation, a month

before the war began, President Bush described the ties in detail,

saying, ``Saddam Hussein has longstanding, direct and continuing ties

to terrorist networks. . . .''

He said:

Who gave the President this information? The NIE? Scooter Libby?

Chalabi?

In fact, there was no operational link and no clear and persuasive

pattern of ties between the Iraq Government and al-Qaida. A 9/11

Commission staff statement in June of 2004 put it plainly:

The 9/11 Commission Report stated clearly that there was no

``operational'' connection between Saddam and al-Qaida. That fact

should have been abundantly clear to the President.

The Pentagon's favorite Iraqi dissident, Ahmed Chalabi, is actually

proud of what happened. ``We are heroes in error,'' Chalabi said in

February 2004. ``As far as we're concerned, we've been entirely

successful. That tyrant Saddam is gone and the Americans are in

Baghdad. What was said before is not important. The Bush administration

is looking for a scapegoat. We're ready to fall on our swords, if he

wants.''

What was said before does matter. The President's words matter. The

Vice President's words matter. So do those of the Secretary of State

and the Secretary of Defense and other high officials in the

administration. And they did not square with the facts.

The Intelligence Committee agreed to investigate the clear

discrepancies, and it is important that they get to the bottom of this

and find out how and why President Bush took America to war in Iraq.

Americans are dying. Already more than 2,000 have been killed and more

than 15,000 have been wounded.

The American people deserve the truth. It is time for the President

to stop passing the buck and for him to be held accountable.

I yield back the remainder of the time.